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HOW TO DETECT SPURIOUS "SÈVRES."

IN an excellent handbook on French pottery, recently prepared for the South Kensington Museum Committee of the Council on Education by Paul Gasnault and Edward Garnier, valuable hints are given for the detection of imitations of Sèvres porcelain, and in particular of soft porcelain. The quantity of spurious "Old Sèvres" sold in Paris, and of *pâte tendre* yearly exported, chiefly to America and England, is not to be believed. The knowledge of the names and marks of the principal painters of old Sèvres may, in many instances, assist in detecting false pieces; for it often happens that the forgers have indiscriminately copied the marks of Sèvres, and placed the signature of a gilder on pieces painted in colors, or the monogram of a painter of flowers on pieces decorated with figures, and vice versa. Besides the difference in the marks we have noted, several other signs may assist us in distinguishing the genuine Sèvres porcelain. Among the various imitations of "Old Sèvres," a whole class difficult to distinguish consists of pieces of genuine white porcelain manufactured at Sèvres, and decorated afterward and even recently. In his enthusiasm for kaolinic or hard porcelain, Brongniart had wholly discontinued the manufacture of soft paste, and in 1804 he caused to be sold by the *van-load*, and at ridiculously low prices, all that remained of undecorated soft porcelain in the warehouses of the old manufactory of Louis XV. This porcelain was purchased by "*chambrelans*"* of Paris, and even by dealers of London, where French porcelain was much esteemed, and has been from that time, and is still, the staple article of the higher branch of the spurious porcelain trade. It requires a very exercised eye to distinguish it when well decorated, as was the case during the first years of the "Restoration;" for at that time a certain number of painters who formerly belonged to the manufactory were still living (some of whom had been superannuated, while others had deserted the manufactory); these, being practically acquainted with the old processes of decoration, lent their skilful assistance to the dealers without considering the consequences. Porcelain thus decorated has for a long time been considered, even by the most competent judges, as authentic Sèvres porcelain; as, for instance, a breakfast service presented in 1816 to Louis XVIII. as having be-

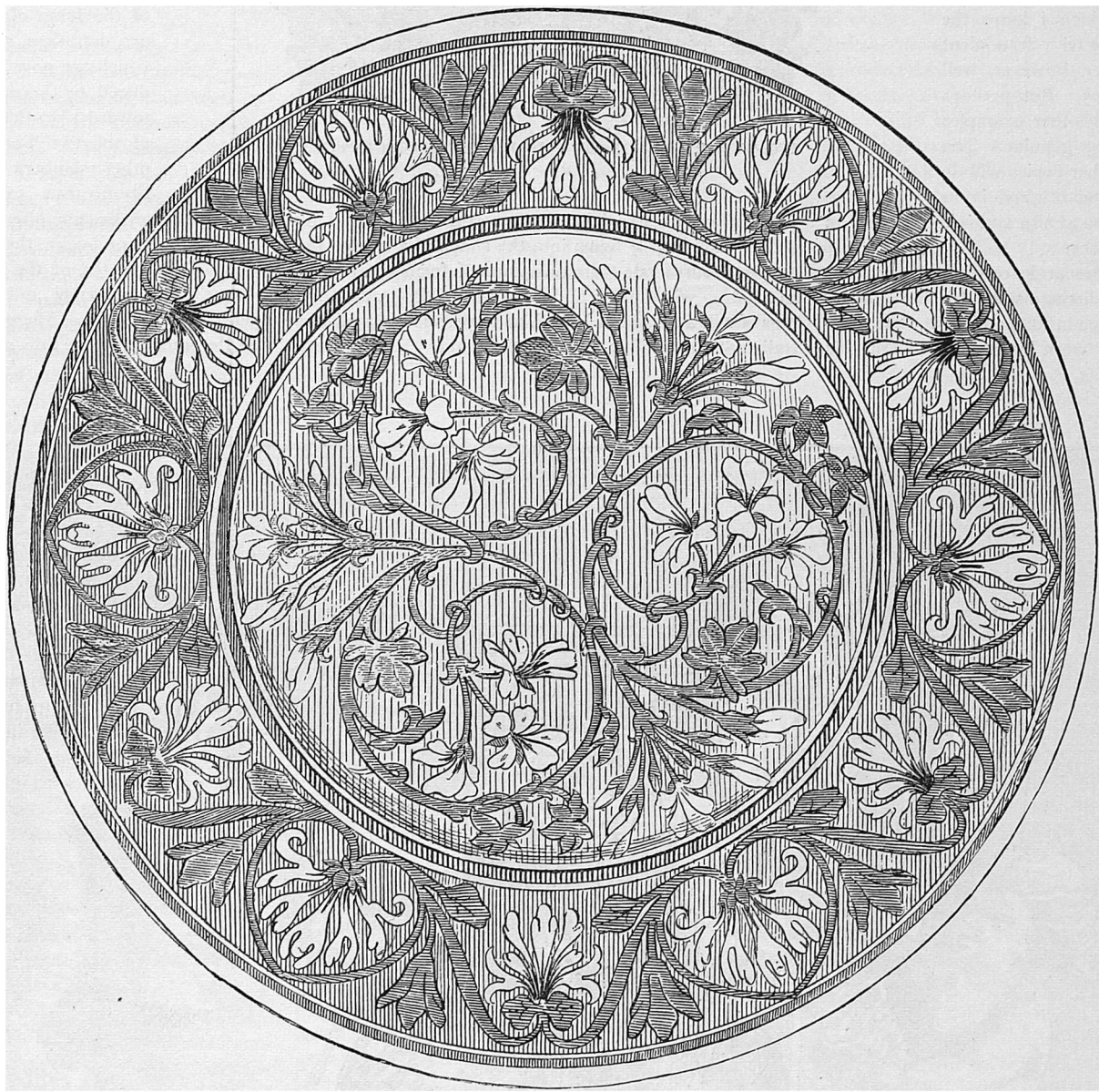
longed to Louis XV. This service, ornamented with the portraits of Louis XIV. and the celebrated ladies of his court, was given by the king (when its spuriousness had been proved to him) to the Ceramic Museum of Sèvres, where it now is.

However perfectly the decoration may have been executed on porcelain of this kind, there are yet other signs by which it may be distinguished. The first, which is almost infallible, but requires a practised eye and a good knowledge of soft porcelain, is the use of chrome green in the painting of bouquets and landscapes. Discovered only in 1802, oxide of chromium was, on account of its being difficult of fusion and of the richness of its color, soon substituted for oxide of copper, hitherto exclusively employed for making green colors; and chrome green, originally used only at Sèvres, rapidly became a commer-

Again, soft porcelain which has not been decorated at Sèvres may easily enough be distinguished by a striking peculiarity in the gilding. The gold thickly laid on has always, on old porcelain—the true kind—a dull appearance; it was simply sprinkled on when the piece came out of the muffle-kiln (as is even now the practice), and was then polished into designs or modelled with a common nail firmly set in a wooden handle. In the early part of this century agate burnishers were substituted, which made the work easier, but changed the character of the old gilding, and made a great difference in the lines thus burnished. In old Sèvres porcelain the lines are firm, clean-edged, well-defined, and in some cases slightly hollow; for when the nail was used the polish was produced chiefly by pressure, while in imitation or modern porcelain the lines are wider, less pure, and above all less "graven," as it were, because with the agate burnishers the polish is more easily obtained, and simply by gentle friction.


The following hints for detecting fraud in the hard porcelain products of the Sèvres factory, reproduced from the same source as the foregoing, are not less valuable:

The present mark consists of a circular stamp, with a double line bearing in the centre an R and an F interlaced, with the words "*doré*" or "*décoré à Sèvres*," and the date; in 1871 and 1872 the old stamp, bearing the monogram of the French Republic, was used. Since the year 1810 all these marks have been printed on entirely finished pieces, and consequently baked in the muffle-kiln; it was therefore easy to imitate them, and the forgers who, for the last thirty years especially, have dealt in Sèvres porcelain were not slow in taking advantage of this. In order to prevent fraud a supplementary mark has, since 1848, been printed on the "*biscuit*;" it is a chrome-



MONOCHROME PLATE DECORATION. BY A. REGNIER.

cial commodity of general use. The painters who subsequently decorated the porcelain sold by Brongniart evidently lost sight of this fact, and made use of the only green pigments which were then to be found, not thinking that by so doing they themselves supplied the means of detecting fraud. Chrome green is warmer in tone and more yellow than copper green, and has not, like the latter, when thickly laid on, that metallic appearance so characteristic and so conspicuous in some kinds of soft porcelain, in the *faïence* of Strasburg and Marseilles, and in particular in the Chinese porcelain known to amateurs under the name of "*famille verte*." The difference of color in the two kinds of porcelain is sufficiently discernible to be perceived by a practised eye, and is particularly evident when two pieces, the one genuine and the other spurious, are placed side by side and compared with one another.

green mark capable of standing the heat of the kiln, and which, being under the glaze, cannot possibly be imitated. If the piece, on coming out of the kiln, is found to have any defect, the following indelible mark is notched by the lathe, which cuts into the enamel:  If, on the contrary, the piece is faultless, it is placed in the white porcelain storehouse, where it often remains for many years before being decorated and completely finished; it is then marked with the printed stamp. It is therefore not uncommon to see porcelain bearing, for instance, the green mark of 1856, and the supplementary mark, "*décoré à Sèvres, R F, 1874*."

In the year 1878 the Improvement Committee thought it expedient to suppress the *green* mark as likely to favor fraud, or rather imposition; but it was soon found that this suppression, far from preventing, rather faci-

* The name of "*chambrelans*" was given to the porcelain painters who worked in their own dwellings, "*en chambre*," and decorated, or employed a sometimes numerous staff to decorate, the porcelain manufactured in Paris or Limoges for the large Parisian retail establishments.

tated fraud, and the green mark was resumed in 1879. The green stamp, *when notched*, indicates in the most positive manner that the porcelain on which it appears has not been decorated at Sévres, all the supplementary marks notwithstanding; and, therefore, all pieces so marked must be rejected as *spurious*, in spite of the assertions of a few unscrupulous dealers who, imposing upon the credulity of their too confident customers, pretend that the marks have been purposely cut into by themselves at the manufactory in order to identify the particular pieces they had selected.

It is difficult to imagine how various are the resources at the service of the men who deal in pseudo-curiosities, and the numerous devices they resort to in order to gain their ends; fillets, gilding, monograms, even the grounds, are transformed or disappear according to the necessities of the *truquage* (make-up) as it is called. We give two examples of it in order better to warn our readers against the snares every day laid for them. We have seen in London, in one of the best-frequented shops, a hard porcelain plate, the centre of which was decorated with a pastoral subject painted over a gilt monogram, which had been removed by means of chemicals, but the outline of which was still apparent under the painting when held slantingly to the light; the two marks of Sévres were perfect, and the dealer could with impunity assert that the piece was *real Sévres porcelain*. Yet a thorough knowledge of the marks would in this case and in the absence of further proofs disclose the fraud; for all *painted* pieces—i.e., decorated with subject-figures, flowers, or landscapes—invariably bear the words “*décoré à Sévres*,” while the gilt pieces, however elaborate and rich their ornamentation, monograms, coats-of-arms, and the like, are marked “*doré à Sévres*,” as was the plate to which we refer.

Another piece we saw in Paris was ornamented with the monogram of King Louis Philippe surrounded with flowers, as it was painted on the table service of daily use, which was sold after the Revolution of 1848, and the pieces of which were, and are now, eagerly purchased, not on account of their artistic merit, but because of the value set upon them by faithful Royalists. That piece was marked under the glaze with the green stamp S, 74 (Sévres, 1874). In this case the fraud was very clumsy, yet the dealer found a purchaser who paid for the porcelain a comparatively exorbitant price.

OLD CHINESE PORCELAINS.

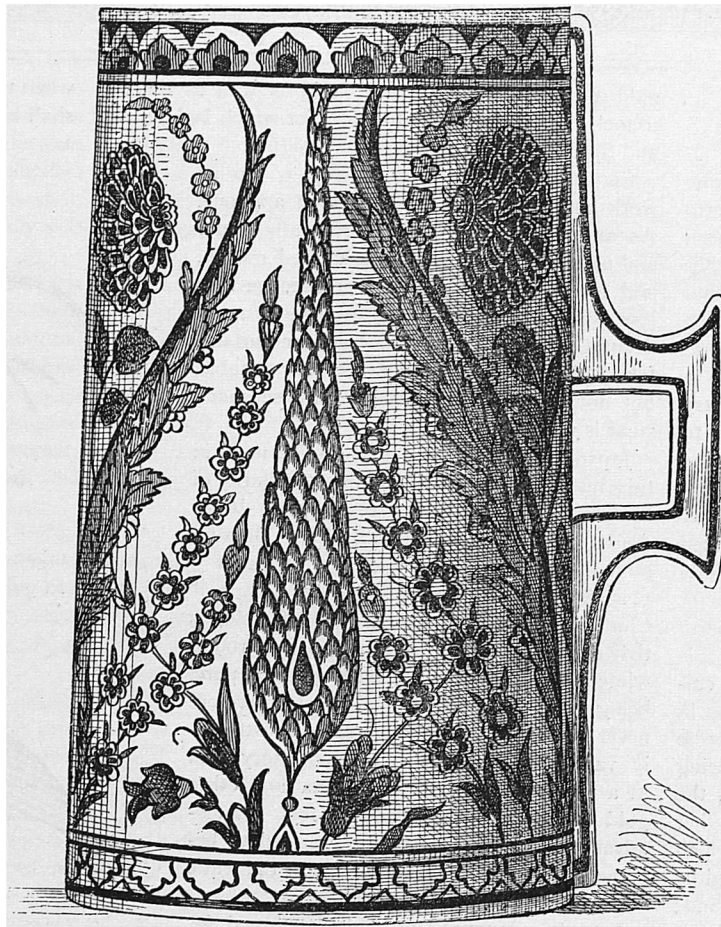
THE very oldest Chinese porcelain is a pure white, without any color whatever, sometimes with figures raised in relief. The earliest color laid on was the blue, and the oldest and finest was the rich deep blue, so much admired, but now so badly imitated even by the Chinese themselves. The next in point of antiquity is the black porcelain, of which many specimens, especially when ornamented with gilding, are considered more beautiful than the more antique manufacture. The crackled or marbled china ware is of more recent date, and so is that called the “egg and spinach”—both of which may be easily counterfeited. These latter have no other distinguishing points; but connoisseurs, on taking up the white and blue, always know where to look for the dolphin or dragon marks. Roger Riordan, in Harper's Magazine, says: “Although it is known that such and such colors and modes of decoration were not in use before certain dates it would be to little purpose to speculate on the exact age of any particular specimen of Chinese porcelain. It is safe to assert of any good piece that it is older than the present century. It may be held as certain that a rose-colored vase, or one into the decoration of which that color enters, cannot have been made longer ago than 1690, while a piece decorated with blue and white may be of the time of the emperor King-te, who reigned for three years, from A.D. 1004 to 1007. If a jar should be painted with personages wearing the pig-tail, it is not more than two hundred and

fifty years old, that appendage having been introduced by the Tartar conquerors; but if the personages represented wear long robes, both men and women, and if the males wear square black head-gear, then it may be of very high

made under such or such an emperor or dynasty, though the inscription may state as much, but as being of such a style. Still, taken in this way, a collection may be made a fairly complete and very interesting index to the history of the art and of the peculiar civilization of the Chinese.”

Of the color on old Chinese porcelains, the same writer remarks that it “is as gentle as it is powerful, as rich in each example as it is varied in a collection. Of red there may be the gorgeous sang de bœuf, ranging from deep Tyrian purple to bright crimson; the splendid coral reds, sometimes, as a last stroke of good fortune in the firing, showing the gold in their coloring matter reduced to the metallic state, or gleaming in the light with all the tints of the rainbow; the rust red of iron, one of the most ancient colors; a vermilion produced from iron; and most valuable of all, though modern, the beautiful tints of rose, due to the chloride of gold. Some French writers make these last into a ‘family’ by themselves, as they also make those pieces that are covered wholly or in part with green, whether it be olive, or ‘apple green,’ or the green of the upper surface of the camellia leaf. Many of these are found on very old pieces, and are iridescent in a high degree. The various celadons tinged with brown or gray form another variety. Even in black and white there are splendid tones, hard to match—mirror black, ivory white, blanc de Chine, dull black in imitation of some European wares, but far superior to them. . . . The very names given at hazard by European collectors would seem to indicate a belief that these queer people had strictly associated with all their notions of color the pleasures of the palate. A bottle of sang de bœuf is really colored like the rich juice from a round of beef; a specimen of ‘mirror black,’ especially if it show around the edge a partially glazed rim of creamy brown, brings to mind Sir Arthur Guinness’s

celebrated stout. There are soft white glazes like ‘congealed fat;’ and we dare say a specimen may yet be found, an antique vase, fine, rich, and distinguished, a gem among the precious vases of rare jade, as say the inscriptions, which in its crackling brown and oily glaze shall reproduce the appetizing exterior of that first roast pig so lusciously described by Charles Lamb. It is mere fact that there are glazes imitating the color of a mule’s lung and that of a horse’s liver, which are unmistakably articles of Chinese diet; and there are, to turn to comparisons less gross, tea-color glazes, and rice-color, and plum and peach-color, and the apple green before mentioned, and mustard yellow, and that white that De Goncourt compares to a species of blanc-mange, and of which he praises the unctuous feel. Apart from color, the character of the material is such that the Chinese themselves, when referring to it, speak of the glaze as the ‘flesh’ of the piece, and the paste as its ‘bone.’ But even yet the list of colors is not exhausted, for there are the violets, old and new, blues of cobalt, turquoise, ultramarine, lavender, clair de lune, and ‘blue of the sky after rain.’ There are factitious jade and imitations of jasper, chalcedony, and colored marble, and pieces streaked or seamed with different colors, or clouded with several shades of the one, flambé or soufflé. There are, besides, the several kinds of crackle, each of which has an influence on any color in connection with which it may be found, and there is the imitation crackle on blue jars of the ‘hawthorn’ pattern, which, with perhaps more reason, is also said to be an imitation of a mass of fish eggs or of frog spawn.” If Mr. Riordan will turn to Dr. Dresser’s “Japan” (page 278) he will find a woodcut which, we think, suggests a far more reasonable explanation of the origin of the hawthorn pattern. The late frost nips the plum blossoms, and causes them to fall on the thin and cracked ice, producing just such an effect as we see in the porcelain.



PERSIAN POTTERY DECORATION.

antiquity. The Chinese, however, have at all times delighted in reproducing the best efforts of former periods, and have, as a matter of course, and without dishonest intent, copied marks, dates, handling, and everything.



PERSIAN POTTERY DECORATION.

BLUE, RED AND YELLOW ON A CREAM-WHITE GROUND.

Chinese collectors have been in the habit of paying as much for a good copy as for an authenticated original. A European or American collector must therefore be content to do as they do, and class a piece, not as having been

FOR cleaning porcelain fuller's earth is valuable; but it must be beaten into a fine powder and carefully cleaned from all hard or rough particles, which might endanger the polish of the brilliant surface.